

The LAMENTATIONS of Jeremiah

INTRODUCTION

1. Title. The first word of the book of Lamentations in Hebrew is *'ekah*, "how!" This word is used in the Hebrew Bible as the name of the book. The Talmud indicates that the ancient Jews also knew the book by the name *Qinoth*, "Lamentations," and this title was translated by the LXX as *Thrēnoi*. The Latin Vulgate took over the Greek title and amplified it with a statement of the traditional authorship of the book, *Threni, id est Lamentationes Jeremiae Prophetae*, "Threni, that is the Lamentations of Jeremiah the Prophet." Thus was developed the title of the book as it stands in the English Bible, "The Lamentations of Jeremiah."

2. Authorship. Both Jews and Christians from ancient times have considered the Lamentations to be the work of the prophet Jeremiah. The earliest testimony to this is contained in the opening words of the book as it stands in the LXX: "And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremias sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said, ..." Although there is no evidence that this statement ever stood in the Hebrew text, it does indicate the belief of a segment of the Jews at least as early as the 2d century B.C. Later testimonies to Jeremiah's authorship are found in the Talmud, the Targums, and the writings of the great Christian Hebrew scholar Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin about A.D. 400.

In modern times critical scholars have doubted that Jeremiah was the author. Their arguments have been based on the fact that nowhere does the Hebrew Bible specifically state that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, and that although the prophecy bearing his name is found in the second section of the Hebrew Bible, known as the Prophets, Lamentations is separated from it and appears in the third section, the Writings (see Vol. I, p. 37). Critics have also pointed to certain passages which they feel do not fit the character of Jeremiah as revealed in his other writings (Lam. 1:21; 2:9; 3:59–66; 4:17, 20).

However, none of these arguments are conclusive. Scholars, both critical and conservative, are united in the belief that Lamentations was written in the days of Jeremiah. There are, moreover, several striking parallels of phraseology and subject matter between Jeremiah's prophecy and the Lamentations, which point to him as author. In view of the lack of definitive evidence that he was not the author, there is no reason to disregard the ancient belief of the Jews that Jeremiah wrote the Lamentations (see PK 461–463).

3. Historical setting. The historical setting of the book of Lamentations is in the final days of the kingdom of Judah, particularly the destruction of Jerusalem, with all its attendant evils, both during and after the final siege of the city. After the death of good king Josiah the political, social, and religious situation deteriorated rapidly under the successive reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (for a complete discussion of this period, see pp. 346–348). The people of Jerusalem suffered the most intense hardships during the final siege of the city, 588–586 B.C. Practically the whole population of Judah was swept away by successive waves of Babylonian conquest and captivity (for the three principal stages of the Captivity, 605–586 B.C., see Vol. III, pp. 90, 91). Only the poorest of the land were left, scattered throughout the near-empty cities and countryside. Little wonder that the book of Lamentations pours forth the mournful tones of distress and sorrow.

4. Theme. More than a century before the fall of Jerusalem the prophet Micah had foretold its destruction, because the leaders of Judah “build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity” (Micah 3:10). For 40 years Jeremiah urged the people of Judah to repent; he sought to strengthen the hands of Josiah and his sons toward just government at home and a wise and honest policy abroad; and above all, he warned Judah of the certainty of destruction to come if she persisted in her evil ways. The Lamentations are the climax of these prophecies. They testify to the sure fulfillment of God’s promised judgments. Yet their message is not without hope. Through the picture of desolation runs a thread of expectation that the Lord will forgive and relieve the sufferings of His people. In the final chapter this hope swells into a prayer: “Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old” (Lam. 5:21).

The literary structure of Lamentations reflects its theme. The book is made up of five poems, corresponding to the five chapters in our modern printed Bibles. The first four of these are written in a meter typical of the Hebrew *qinah*, or elegy (see Vol. III, p. 27).

While the elegiac meter is often lost in translation, it does show through frequently in the English of Lamentations, as in the following example:

“Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction,
and because of great servitude:
She dwelleth among the heathen,
she findeth no rest:
All her persecutors overtook her
between the straits” (Lam. 1:3).

The fifth poem, which is a prayer rather than an elegy, is written in the usual Hebrew poetic meter, each of the two halves of a verse having four stress accents. See also Vol. III pp. 19, 27.

5. Outline.

- I. The Sad Condition of Once-proud Jerusalem, 1:1–22.
 - A. The lamentable state of the city, 1:1–11.
 - B. The wail of the city over her own condition, 1:12–17.
 - C. The confession and prayer of the city, 1:18–22.
- II. The Judgments of God Upon Wicked Jerusalem, 2:1–22.
 - A. War, siege, and destruction, 2:1–13.
 - B. Captivity and distress, 2:14–22.
- III. Hope Amid Afflictions, 3:1–66.
 - A. The people despair because of their afflictions, 3:1–20.
 - B. The people turn in hope to God, 3:21–41.
 - C. A further description of God’s judgments, 3:42–54.
 - D. A prayer recognizing God’s mercies, 3:55–63.
 - E. A prayer for God to punish the enemies of His people, 3:64–66.
- IV. Judgments Upon the People of Judah as a Result of Their Sins, 4:1–22.
 - A. The appalling calamities that have come upon the people, 4:1–12.
 - B. The iniquity of prophets and priests, 4:13–16.
 - C. The downfall of the kingdom of Judah, 4:17–20.
 - D. Judgment prophesied on Edom, Lam 4:21, 22.
- V. A Prayer for Restoration to God’s Favor, 5:1–22.
 - A. The pitiful plight of the people after the fall of Jerusalem, 5:1–18.
 - B. Recognition that only God can restore, 5:19–22.

CHAPTER 1

1 *The miserable estate of Jerusalem by reason of her sin.* 12 *She complaineth of her grief,*
18 *and confesseth God's judgment to be righteous.*

1. How. Heb. *'ekah*. An exclamation frequently used to open a Hebrew elegy (Lam. 2:1; 4:1, 2; Isa. 1:21). *'Ekah* was taken as the title of the book in the Hebrew Bible (see p. 543).

This chapter, like chs. 2; 3; and 4, is an acrostic poem (see Vol. III, p. 625). Each verse begins with a different Hebrew letter, arranged in alphabetical order.

Sit solitary. Jerusalem, deserted and ruined, presents a woeful contrast to the once-thriving capital, famous for its architectural beauty and strategic strength. The same figure, a woman sitting forlorn and dejected, is employed in a victory medal issued by the Roman conqueror Titus, who captured Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and destroyed the Temple. This medal depicts a woman weeping beneath a palm tree, below which is the inscription, *Judaea capta*, "Judea captured."

Become as a widow. Jerusalem is bereaved of her people (see on Jer. 4:25). She is also a widow in that the Lord is no longer her husband. Jewish commentators stress the word "as": she is only temporarily a widow, inasmuch as the Lord has forsaken her but "for a small moment" (Isa. 54:6, 7).

Tributary. Heb. *mas*, "forced service," or "a person levied to forced service." The word seems to involve servitude as well as taxation. It is used in connection with the Egyptian taskmasters (Ex. 1:11).

2. All her lovers. The nations surrounding Judah with whom she made defensive alliances against the Babylonians (see Lam. 1:19; see on Jer. 4:30).

None to comfort her. This wail recurs repeatedly throughout the lament (vs. 9, 17, 21). Although the context indicates that this expression applies primarily to Judah's rejection by her neighbors, it also reflects the nation's temporary rejection by God.

Dealt treacherously. When the Babylonians appeared in Judah, her neighbors, who had encouraged her to join in rebellion against Babylon (see on Jer. 27:3), deserted her, and some even joined in spoiling her (2 Kings 24:2; Ps. 137:7; Obadiah 10–13). The point of this verse is that Judah has committed spiritual adultery by seeking alliances with her heathen neighbors, rather than obeying God and depending on Him for safety. When the crisis came, her lovers turned against her, and she is now spurned by all, and a captive.

3. Dwelleth among the heathen. Or, "sits among the Gentiles." The parallel between Jerusalem's desolation and her people's loneliness in exile is strengthened by the use of the same word here as in v. 1: there the city sits solitary; here her people sit among the Gentiles.

Findeth no rest. A fulfillment of Deut. 28:65. The Heb. *manoach*, here translated "rest," may refer to a resting place (Gen. 8:9; Isa. 34:14), to rest for the soul (Ps. 116:7), or to security in marriage (Ruth 3:1). In this last sense, especially, it seems to fit here; in searching for safety, Judah went after wicked lovers, who deserted her. Now in her punishment, there is no conjugal security for her (see on Lam. 1:1).

Straits. Or, "distresses."

4. *The ways of Zion.* Or, “the roads of Zion.” Jerusalem lay at the convergence of four main roads: one from Jericho in the Jordan valley, one from Joppa on the Mediterranean, one from Hebron on the south, and one that followed the ridge of the hill country from Samaria on the north. These, with all the minor routes leading in from surrounding villages, had once been crowded with pilgrims at the times of the great annual feasts. Now they are deserted.

Solemn feasts. Jeremiah was doubtless present in 622 B.C. at the greatest Passover service Jerusalem had ever seen (2 Kings 23:21–23). Such memories make the present desolation seem even more bitter.

Her gates. Probably a reference to the space just inside the gates that served as a public meeting place for trade and governmental transactions (see Deut. 21:19; Ruth 4:1, 11; 2 Sam. 19:8; 1 Kings 22:10; Amos 5:12, 15; see on Gen. 19:1; Joshua 8:29). All the daily commerce of the great city has ceased.

Virgins. Heb. *bethuloth* (see on Isa. 7:14).

5. *Chief.* Or, “head.” A fulfillment of Deut. 28:44.

The Lord hath afflicted. The prophet recognizes that God’s hand is in Jerusalem’s present condition. This is entirely in harmony with Jeremiah’s prophecies before the Captivity (Jer. 26:4–6; 32:28–35).

Transgressions. Heb. *pasha‘im*, “rebellions,” “revolts,” or “transgressions,” that is, sins committed willfully (see Jer. 2:8; Lam. 3:42). For such sins there was no specific sacrifice provided in the sanctuary service. Yet there was still hope for ultimate salvation; the sanctuary service was not entirely without provision for such iniquity, as “transgressions” (*pasha‘im*) are listed among those sins brought out of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:21). Christ “was wounded for our transgressions” (Isa. 53:5).

6. *Without strength.* Probably a reference to the way in which Zedekiah and his court were captured by the Babylonians (Jer. 39:4, 5).

7. *When her people fell.* Since this clause immediately follows the major metrical pause marking the middle of the verse in the Hebrew Bible (see p. 544), it properly belongs to the latter half of the verse rather than to the first half.

Sabbaths. Heb. *mishbathim*. This word occurs only here in the OT, hence its exact meaning is uncertain. The noun *mishbath* is derived from the verb *shabath*, “to cease,” “to rest,” from which the noun *shabbath*, “sabbath,” is also derived. Therefore many translators have considered *mishbath* as synonymous with the related word *shabbath*. Jewish tradition also recognizes this interpretation (*Midrash Rabbah*, *Lamentations*, sec. 34). Recent translators have preferred to go closer to the root meaning of the verb *shabath*, and consider *mishbath* to mean “cessation,” etc. *Mishbath* is also closely related to the noun *shebeth*, “inaction [caused by sickness].” As there is evidence that before the fall of Jerusalem the Jews were not keeping the Sabbath (Jer. 17:19–27), it would seem that her enemies would hardly now mock at her for her Sabbaths unless at her belated attention to it. The reference is here perhaps more broadly to the mocking at the downfall (see RSV) and general desolation of Judah.

8. Is removed. Literally, “is an excretion,” or “is become impure.” The phrase implies here both ceremonial and moral uncleanness (2 Chron. 29:5; Ezra 9:11). Cleansing from such defilement is promised those who desire it (Zech. 13:1).

Nakedness. It was customary for conquerors to humiliate their captives by marching them naked into exile (see Isa. 20:4; 47:2, 3; Jer. 13:22, 26; Eze. 23:29; Nahum 3:5). In 1878 at *Balawât* in Assyria discovery was made of several bronze door panels depicting the conquests of Shalmaneser III (859–824 B.C.). Lines of captives are shown; the men are without clothing, while the women are forced to hold open the fronts of their skirts as they march. Doubtless Jeremiah saw the people of Judah thus humiliated, and from this experience he draws an illustration of how the iniquity of the nation is now made visible to all.

9. Remembereth not. Or, “she considered not.”

No comforter. See on v. 2.

Behold my affliction. The city herself is depicted as breaking into a wail and joining the lament of the prophet.

10. Spread out his hand. Evidently, to seize and to control.

Heathen entered. The Ammonites and Moabites were not even to enter the congregation (Deut. 23:3, 4); now they, with other Gentiles, have defiled the holy places (see 2 Kings 24:2; Ps. 74; 79) from which even a Jew who was not a priest was excluded.

11. Bread. Heb. *lechem*. This word, while used specifically of bread, often has the general sense of “food” (1 Kings 5:11; Ps. 136:25).

Meat. Heb. *’okel*, “food,” that is, anything to eat.

Relieve the soul. Literally, “cause the soul to return,” that is, “refresh life.” “Soul,” Heb. *nephesh*, is used here in its more basic sense of “life” (see on 1 Kings 17:21; Ps. 16:10).

See, O Lord. Here again Jerusalem is depicted as speaking (see on v. 9), and continues as the speaker (except for v. 17) to the end of the chapter.

12. Is it nothing to you? Literally, “not to you.” This may be translated as a question or as a statement, “It is nothing to you.” The Talmud interprets the passage as a warning, “Let it not come unto you!”

Sorrow. Heb. *mak’ob*, “pain.”

13. From above. That is, from heaven.

My bones. This same expression is often used in the sense of the “very self” (see Gen. 7:13, “in the selfsame day”). The destruction is so complete that it is as if fire from heaven had struck the very heart of Jerusalem (see Isa. 31:9).

Turned me back. Literally, “caused me to return.” The prophet makes a forceful play on words: he uses the same Hebrew word (see on v. 11) to describe the refreshing of physical life that the people vainly sought; now here, instead of their lives being “caused to return,” they themselves are “caused to turn back” by God from the paths of sin.

Faint. Literally, “sick.” Note the three judgments: fire, a net, and sickness.

14. Yoke. The prophet’s intent is to show that Jerusalem now realizes that her transgressions (see on v. 5) are the direct cause of her punishment—her sins are a yoke about her neck. God had once broken the yoke of servitude for His people (Jer. 2:20), but

they in turn had broken His yoke of service (Jer. 5:5; see Ps. 2:3). Now they receive another yoke of servitude (see Jer. 27:2; 28:14; 30:8).

15. *Midst of me.* The mighty men of Judah did not perish on the battlefield, but rather while fighting defensively within the city, or while seeking to flee the country.

Assembly. A startling contrast to the thought expressed in v. 4. There none come to the religious assemblies, but here God has brought, instead, a great assembly of Jerusalem's enemies against her.

Virgin. Jerusalem had been considered impregnable and inviolate (Lam. 4:12; see Jer. 18:13). A parallel passage to Lam. 1:15, 16, and incidentally a testimony to Jeremiah's authorship of Lamentations, is Jer. 14:17.

Winepress. A symbol of God's wrath (Isa. 63:3; Joel 3:13; Rev. 14:19; 19:15).

16. *Relieve my soul.* See on v. 11. Whereas the people of Jerusalem vainly sought physical nourishment during the final siege, now they realize their need of the greater spiritual food.

17. *Zion.* Parenthetically the prophet breaks into the lament of the city, emphasizing her rejection by adding his testimony.

Spreadeth forth. Evidently in supplication (see Ex. 9:29; 1 Kings 8:38).

His adversaries. A reference to the neighboring nations who turned against Judah when she expected their help against the Babylonians (see on v. 2).

Menstruous woman. The broader implication of the figure is of an outcast, of something rejected as filthy and abominable, as Jerusalem now is for her sins (see on v. 8).

18. *The Lord is righteous.* An emphatic contrast to the abominable condition of Jerusalem. Here the poem rises above the lament over Jerusalem and recognizes the justice of God in all His dealings with the city. Thus the lament is uttered, not in the attitude of self-pity, but rather to show the bitter remorse that comes to one who realizes the vastness of his own failure in the sight of a righteous God. There can be no question of God's righteousness. Whatever He does is right, for He is the standard of righteousness (see Job 38–41; Rom. 9:20).

His commandment. Literally, "his mouth." The expression, "the mouth" of the Lord, is used to mean "the utterance," or "the order," of the Lord, that is, all the instruction that comes from Him.

Sorrow. See on v. 12.

19. *Lovers.* See on vs. 2, 17.

In the city. The priests and elders did not die in defense of the Temple or in the execution of their offices, but while they were going about the most elemental act of seeking food to preserve their lives (see on v. 15).

Meat. Heb. *'okel*, "food" (see on v. 11).

Relieve their souls. See on v. 11.

20. *My bowels.* A characteristic Hebrew expression indicating strong emotion (see on Jer. 4:19).

Grievously rebelled. That is, "I have surely rebelled." The city is portrayed as breaking down completely and making a full and abject confession of her sins.

The sword bereaveth. A recognition of the fulfillment of Jer. 15:7 (see Deut. 32:25).

21. *Thou hast done it.* Judah's enemies seem particularly pleased that it is her own God, who in times past delivered her so marvelously from her enemies, who has allowed destruction to come upon her.

Thou wilt bring the day. Literally, "thou hast brought." So certain is the prophet that God's judgments will ultimately fall also on the wicked nations who now oppress Judah, that he places his statement in the Hebrew perfect tense, indicating completed action. The fact that God used the heathen to punish Judah in no way implied that those nations were innocent of even greater sins (see ch. 5:11). The surety with which the promised punishment came to Judah only made more inevitable the fulfillment of the prophesied judgments on her neighbors (see Jer. 25:17–26; Hab. 1:5–17; 2:1–8; see on Jer. 25:12).

22. *Come before thee.* That is, in judgment.

Faint. Literally, "sick," or "sickly."

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1 PK 461

2–5PK 462

CHAPTER 2

1 *Jeremiah lamenteth the misery of Jerusalem. 20 He complaineth thereof to God.*

1. *How.* Heb. *'ekah* (see on ch. 1:1).

This chapter is an acrostic poem of the same type as ch. 1 (see on ch. 1:1).

His anger. Reference to God's anger recurs in vs. 3, 6, 21, 22 and sets the theme for this chapter, namely, the fury of divine wrath.

The beauty of Israel. Or, "the glory of Israel." This may be a reference to the Temple (see on Isa. 60:7; 63:15).

His footstool. That is, the sanctuary (Ps. 99:5; 132:7), with particular focus on the ark (1 Chron. 28:2; see on Eze. 43:7).

2. *The Lord.* In amplification of the thought in ch. 1:12–15, the prophet here ascribes to Jehovah all of Judah's affliction, which he narrates in detail. The Lord is often said to do that which He does not prevent (see on 2 Sam. 24:1). Thus the prophet emphasizes the ethical nature of Judah's distress.

Habitations. Heb. *ne'oth*, "pasturelands," or "abodes." *Ne'oth* is repeatedly used of the dwelling places of shepherds, and their pasturelands (Ps. 23:2; 65:13; Jer. 9:19; 23:10; 25:37; Amos 1:2). Here the word evidently refers to the unfortified places of Judah, in contrast with the "strong holds" mentioned immediately after.

Polluted the kingdom. This was the people whom God had destined to be "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6).

3. *Horn.* Frequently used as a symbol of strength, glory, or pride (see Deut. 33:17; Job 16:15; Ps. 75:4; Jer. 48:25; Amos 6:13).

Drawn back. In times past God's protecting hand had been used in defense of His people (Ex. 6:6; Ps. 98:1–3). Now every restraint has been removed from the enemy (see Ps. 74:11).

4. *Like an enemy.* The prophet could not go so far as to say that the Lord was Judah's enemy, for He was not. While using the enemies of the Jews to punish them, God seemed to them as an enemy, yet His judgments were poured out that His people might return to Him.

His right hand. See on v. 3. Now God's right hand not only has ceased to protect the people of Judah, but also is portrayed as being actively turned against them.

In the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion. The traditional Hebrew punctuation indicates that this phrase belongs at the end of the verse.

5. Her palaces. Verses 5–8 portray the progressive steps in the destruction of the city: the palaces and forts, the Temple, the altar, and the walls. Four weeks after the capture of Jerusalem the Babylonian commander, Nebuzar-adan, had burned the Temple, the royal palace, the leading residences, and broken down the walls (Jer. 52:12–14).

His strong holds. Literally, “fortifications.” The variation in gender here probably is the result of thinking of the palaces as belonging to Jerusalem, “the daughter of Judah,” while the fortified cities (including Jerusalem herself) belong to the country, Israel.

Mourning and lamentation. Heb. *ta'aniyyah wa'aniyyah*. These synonymous words, both from the Hebrew verb *'anah*, “to mourn,” are very effective poetically (see Jewish Publication Society Version, “mourning and moaning”). The same Hebrew words are also used in Isa. 29:2.

6. Tabernacle. Reference is apparently to the swiftness with which the Temple was destroyed.

To be forgotten. God's judgments on Judah—the destruction of the Temple and deportation of the population—had resulted in the discontinuance of Sabbath and feast-day services in the Temple (see ch. 1:4). The prophet is looking at conditions as they exist from the standpoint of the ruined city and does not mean to imply that God had purposed a cessation of Sabbath observance by His people (see Jer. 17:27; Zeph. 3:18).

7. Noise. The tumult of the victorious Babylonian soldiers as they loot the sanctuary is compared with the shouting, singing, and dancing of the Israelites at their great yearly assemblies (see Ps. 42:4; 74:3–8; Isa. 30:29).

8. Stretched out a line. That is, a measuring line. This expression is used in Zech. 1:16 in reference to the rebuilding of the Temple. In 2 Kings 21:13 and Isa. 34:11 it is used, as here, of judgment and destruction. The implication is that as the architect builds with precision, so also does God destroy.

His hand. See on vs. 3, 4.

9. The law is no more. Literally, “[there is] no law.” This may be interpreted, either (1) that the law is no longer in force because the king and princes are in exile, or (2) that these rulers are captive in a land where the law of God is not recognized. However, the Heb. *torah*, “law,” is a word of very broad usage, with the basic meaning of “instruction” (see on Deut. 31:9; Prov. 3:1). In its present context it does not seem unreasonable to understand *torah* here to refer to the whole framework of counsel and guidance that had departed from Judah with the exile of her government, her priests (to whom was especially committed the teaching of *torah*), and her prophets.

Her prophets. See Ps. 74:9; Eze. 7:26. This is a reference to the group of professional men who constituted the prophetic class, or party, in Judah, and who had been unfaithful to their calling (Jer. 18:18; 28:1–17). It does not include faithful prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, who all received divine revelations after the fall of Jerusalem (Jer. 42:4, 7; Eze. 32–48; Dan. 5–12).

10. Dust ... sackcloth. Signs of mourning (Joshua 7:6; 2 Sam. 13:19; Neh. 9:1; Job 2:12).

11. My bowels. See on ch. 1:20.

Liver. Literally, “the heavy organ.” The liver was thought by the ancients to be the heaviest of all the abdominal organs. Inasmuch as the viscera were considered to be the seat of the emotions, the “pouring out of the liver” is a striking figure indicating extreme emotional upheaval.

12. To their mothers. Here is portrayed the most pitiful picture of all that warfare brings, the cries of starving children in the arms of helpless parents.

Corn and wine. Representative of solid and liquid food in general (see Deut. 11:14).

Soul was poured out. When they died of hunger at their mothers’ breasts (see on Ps. 16:10; 1 Kings 17:21).

13. Equal to thee. The thought of this verse is that there is no one else who has suffered as greatly as Jerusalem and whose experience might be held up to her by way of comfort. Her punishment is made more keen by the thought that never before has anyone suffered as severely as she.

14. Foolish things. The implication is that the unfaithful prophets of Judah had devised visions to please the people (see Lam. 2:9; Micah 3:5).

Discovered. Literally, “uncovered,” or “revealed” (see ch. 4:22).

Burdens. This word is probably to be taken here in its secondary sense, “an utterance,” that is, “a prophetic message,” which to a true prophet of God was a burden until it was faithfully delivered (see on Isa. 13:1; Eze. 12:10).

Causes of banishment. Or, “enticements.” The Hebrew word from which this is translated occurs only once in the OT, so its exact meaning remains uncertain. The bitter denunciation here heaped upon false prophets stands as a warning to all who speak for God (see Eze. 12:24; 13:6–9; 22:28). A major share of the responsibility for Judah’s suffering is laid upon those who led her astray in the name of the Lord.

15. Hiss. See on Jer. 18:16.

Wag their head. Usually an expression of scorn (see Matt. 27:39; Mark 15:29).

16. All. The Hebrew letters *pe*’ and *ayin*, which begin vs. 16, 17 respectively in the Hebrew Bible, are in the reverse of their usual alphabetical order (see on ch. 1:1). No satisfactory explanation for this change has been found. The reversal occurs also in ch. 3:46, 49 and in ch. 4:16, 17, and is thus characteristic of the author of Lamentations.

Opened their mouth. That is, to devour (see Ps. 22:13).

Gnash the teeth. An expression of hatred and contempt (see Ps. 35:16; 37:12).

17. Days of old. Many centuries before, God had warned Israel of the calamities that would come upon her if she persisted in disobeying Him (Lev. 26:14–39; Deut. 28:15–68). A long succession of prophets had repeated these warnings. Now they are fulfilled.

Horn. See on v. 3.

18. Their heart. The antecedent, though not stated, most logically is understood to be the people of Judah.

O wall. As in v. 8, the wall is taken as representing the city of Jerusalem.

Apple of thine eye. Generally understood to refer to the pupil of the eye, or perhaps to the eyeball itself.

19. Arise. Heb. *qum* (see on Mark 5:41). The thought here is of one arising from bed, as the setting in this text is at night.

Beginning of the watches. In OT times it was usual among the Jews to divide the night into three parts, or “watches”: the first from sunset till about ten o’clock, the “middle watch” (Judges 7:19) from ten till about two, and the “morning watch” (Ex. 14:24; 1 Sam. 11:11) from two till sunrise. Here the thought seems to be that throughout the night—at dark, late in the evening, and in the early hours of the morning, when everyone is fast asleep—the people of Jerusalem are called forth from their beds to seek the Lord in their dire extremity.

Pour out. See on v. 11.

Lift up thy hands. Anciently, a common posture while praying (see Ps. 28:2; 63:4; 119:48; 134:2; 1 Tim. 2:8).

Top of every street. See Lam. 4:1; Isa. 51:20; Nahum 3:10. Ancient cities were not generally laid out according to a plan; streets were often little more than crooked passageways leading to open squares and other centers of public concourse. The “top,” or “head,” of the street evidently refers to its opening into a square or intersection.

20. Behold. Verses 20–22 constitute the prayer that Judah makes to the Lord in response to the cry of v. 19.

Consider. Jerusalem does not seek to instruct God as to what He should do. In a spirit of true prayer and repentance, she calls only for His attention, recognizing that the Father knows better than she what is best for her.

To whom. The frightful scenes depicted were brought, not upon a heathen nation, but upon God’s chosen people, to whom His richest blessings had once been promised on condition of their obedience (see Gen. 12:2, 3, 15:5; 18:18; 26:3, 4; 28:14; Deut. 28:1–13; 30:1–10; 33). So those who claim the richest promises of God take upon themselves a corresponding responsibility to allow the righteousness of Christ to cover their lives, that they may not be found unworthy of the blessings they desire.

The extremity of Israel’s suffering is indicative of the immeasurable richness of the blessings the nation would have received had it remained faithful to Jehovah.

Eat their fruit. That is, their children (see ch. 4:10). Such atrocities in time of extremity were prophesied in Deut. 28:53; Jer. 19:9. That is actually happened is testified by the narrative in 2 Kings 6:28, 29.

Of a span long. Heb. *tippuchim*. This word is somewhat obscure, for it appears nowhere else in the OT. It has been variously translated, “of handbreadth,” “swaddled,” “dandled,” “of tender care,” “fully formed and healthy,” etc. Whatever the exact meaning of *tippuchim*, it seems to indicate that the children were lovable little babes, who would have been greatly cherished and protected in ordinary times.

22. A solemn day. See on ch. 1:15.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–4PK 462

13 PK 463

15 GC 17

CHAPTER 3

1 *The faithful bewail their calamities.* 22 *By the mercies of God they nourish their hope.* 37 *They acknowledge God’s justice.* 55 *They pray for deliverance,* 64 *and vengeance on their enemies.*

1. I am. This poem is a triple acrostic in the Hebrew Bible; that is, each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is the initial letter of three successive verses, in alphabetical order (see on ch. 1:1). For a discussion of Hebrew poetry, see Vol. III, pp. 17–28.

The man. Two opinions have been generally advanced as to the identity of the speaker in this chapter: (1) that it is Jeremiah recounting his own tribulations, or (2) that the prophet here couches a general picture of the sufferings of Judah in the form of a recital of personal experience. If this poem does set forth Jeremiah's own experience, it is certainly typical of that of the people of Judah. However, there is much to lead to the conclusion that the chapter refers to the general experience of the Jews in the downfall of their kingdom. Chapters 1 and 2 both establish a pattern of personifying the city and nation. It would appear that this device is continued here, as vs. 40–47 suddenly shift to the first person plural, and v. 48 begins a section in the first person singular.

The rod of his wrath. Verses 1–18 portray in general poetic terms the severity of the judgments of God. The term “rod” is used repeatedly in the OT in the sense of an instrument of punishment (Job 21:9; Isa. 10:5). So, here, according to Jeremiah God's punishments are corrections, manifestations of His loving care, visited upon His people that they may turn to Him with sincere hearts (Lam. 3:32, 33, 39, 40).

3. Surely. Heb. *'ak* (see on Ps. 62:1).

Turned. Heb. *shub*, “to return”; used here idiomatically in the sense of a repeated action and thus equivalent to the adverb “again.” The turning of the Lord's hand against His people was repeated.

Note the succession of poetic figures that follows in amplification of v. 3, depicting the various types of punishments: v. 4, sickness; v. 5, siege; v. 6, darkness; vs. 7–9, imprisonment; vs. 10, 11, a beast of prey; vs. 12, 13, a hunter.

5. Builded against me. The thought is either that God has confined His people within walls, or that He has built siege machinery against them—even as Nebuchadnezzar did when he laid siege to Jerusalem.

Gall. Heb. *ro'sh*, “a bitter and poisonous herb” (see on Ps. 69:21). The word is also used for the poison of serpents (Deut. 32:33; Job 20:16).

6. He hath set. In the Hebrew Bible, this verse is almost identical with the last part of Ps. 143:3. Its appearance here is indicative of Jeremiah's familiarity with the psalms.

Dark places. This testifies to the truth that the resting place of the dead is one of darkness and inactivity (see on Eccl. 9:10; Isa. 38:18).

8. When I cry and shout. Or, “When I am crying and shouting”; indicating a continued or repeated action.

He shutteth out. This appears at first to contradict the many assurances that God does hear prayer (see Ps. 65:2; 91:15; Joel 2:32). It must be noted, however, that there is a progression of thought in this poem. At this point Jeremiah is speaking either of his own attitude or of that of his people as they survey their ruined situation. The Lord has not heard their prayers for deliverance. In their discouragement it seems as if He will never hear them. But there is yet hope. As the thought of the poem progresses, assurance is given that “the Lord is good unto them that wait for him. . . . It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord” (Lam. 3:25, 26). Seemingly unanswered prayers are often only a test to determine whether the suppliant is fully prepared to appreciate and utilize to the best advantage the gift he has requested.

9. Made my paths crooked. The picture is that the main roads, or ways, are walled up, and that when the speaker is forced to turn into side paths, he finds them tortuous and difficult.

13. My reins. Literally, “my kidneys,” a figure for the viscera in general, once thought to be the seat of emotions (see on ch. 2:11). God’s arrows have struck at the very vitals of the nation, not only physically, but psychologically (see v. 14). “Reins” in this sense is a common expression with Jeremiah (Jer. 11:20; 12:2; 17:10; 20:12).

14. Their song. A reference to the making of triumphant and derisive music, particularly singing, over a fallen enemy (see on Job 30:9; Ps. 69:12).

15. Made me drunken. Literally, “satiated me.” The thought is not so much that of drunkenness or loss of sobriety, but of being filled to excess.

Wormwood. A very bitter herb, symbolic of the heartbreaking experiences of the Jews (see on Prov. 5:4).

16. Broken my teeth. The figure of food is continued from v. 15. Not only must Judah be sated with the bitterest of drinks, but also her food is filled with gravel. Jewish tradition in the Midrash states that while en route to exile in Babylon, the Jews had to bake their bread in pits, and thus it became mixed with grit.

Ashes. A common symbol of mourning (see 2 Sam. 13:19; Job 2:8).

17. My soul. An idiomatic expression for “me” (see on Ps. 16:10).

Peace. See on Jer. 6:14.

18. Strength. Heb. *nešach* (see on 1 Sam. 15:29).

19. Remembering. The Hebrew may be translated either “remembering,” or “remember,” the choice depending upon the relation of this verse to the preceding and following verses.

Wormwood. See on v. 15.

Gall. See on v. 5.

20. Still in remembrance. When a man is in the right frame of mind, continued reflection on divine judgments brings him humility of spirit.

22. Mercies. Heb. *chasadim* (see Additional Note on Psalm 36). The plural form of the word here suggests the manifestations of God’s love, which are innumerable in variety and never failing.

Verses 22–41 form the center and climax, not only of this poem, but of the whole five chapters of Lamentations. Here is revealed the sublime truth of the Lord’s real intentions toward His afflicted people. These verses answer in unequivocal positives the many negative questions that may arise from a reading of the chapters that open and close the book. Here Jehovah is revealed as a God who, though He punishes, “doth not afflict willingly” (v. 33), and whose “compassions fail not” (v. 22).

23. New every morning. The loving-kindnesses of God—life, health, food, shelter, clothing, human affection and companionship, and countless other blessings—are renewed every day of man’s life with such constancy that one may easily take them for granted and forget that each one is a gift, a manifestation of the steadfast love of Him who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift (see James 1:17).

25. Good. Verses 25–27 begin not only with the same Hebrew letter but also with the same word, *tob*, “good.” Thus is set the tone of this part of the poem.

Wait. Here is the key to confidence in adversity. Waiting implies faith and patience.

26. Hope and quietly wait. Again emphasis is laid upon courageous submission to God's way, which ultimately is always best (see on Rom. 8:28).

27. Yoke. A symbol of subjection or service (see Jer. 27:8, 11, 12).

In his youth. A man is especially fortunate when he learns this lesson in his youth; then his whole succeeding life is tempered by godly patience. Jeremiah himself had been called in his youth to the prophetic office, with all its hardship and heartbreak (Jer. 1:6).

28. He sitteth alone. See ch. 1:1, where in Hebrew the same words are used of Jerusalem (also see Jer. 15:17). This solitary condition is now recognized as being for Jerusalem's benefit.

Verses 28–30 elaborate on what it really means to “bear the yoke” (v. 27). They become even more forceful when it is remembered that this patient humiliation is to be borne in the days of youth.

Borne. Rather, “laid.” The subject, though not stated, must be the Lord. The fact that it is God who imposes the hardship is the basic reason why it is wholesome to endure the yoke.

29. Mouth in the dust. A graphic representation of falling with one's face to the ground in utter submission, a common practice in ancient times (see on Gen. 17:3). Jehu, king of Israel, for instance, is thus portrayed on the famous Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, on which he appears on hands and knees, with his face to the ground, before the Assyrian king, while his servants present tribute (see Vol. II, opposite p. 49).

30. He giveth his cheek. This is a forceful OT statement of the doctrine of turning the other cheek, so impressively taught by Jesus (Matt. 5:39). David's conduct toward Shimei was an outstanding exemplification of this principle (2 Sam. 16:11, 12).

31. For the Lord. Verses 31–33 are the key to a right understanding of the whole book of Lamentations. They are a revelation of God's love behind and through all the suffering He allows to come to His children. The Lord does not permit adversity without reference to man's conduct. While God may times allow affliction, it is also true that man brings it on himself. Punishment, to God, is His “strange act” (Isa. 28:21). In His overruling providence God at times “permits evils to take place that He may prevent still greater evils that would appear” (EGW RH Feb. 4, 1909).

32. Mercies. See on v. 22. The constancy, variety, and number of the “ordinary” daily blessings every man receives, should be proof to the one who suffers adversity that his God yet will “have compassion.”

33. Not afflict willingly. The wonderful love of God for His children fairly radiates through this passage. It is not the desire or will of God to hurt or destroy any of His creatures. He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter. 3:9). In His desire to lead men to salvation the Lord will pour out an abundant manifestation of His mercies. Sometimes, when all else has failed, the Lord, in love to man, will permit afflictions to come upon him, to bring him to repentance. Such was the case with the nation of Judah in Jeremiah's day. “God had long delayed His judgments because of His unwillingness to humiliate His chosen people, but now He would visit His displeasure upon them as a last effort to check them in their evil course” (4T 165).

34. To crush. A vivid reference probably to the custom of ancient conquerors of placing their feet upon the necks of conquered foes. Thus Darius the Great is depicted on

the Behistun inscription with his foot upon the body of the usurper, Gaumata (see Vol. III, p. 70; see also illustration, Vol. I, p. 98).

Prisoners. Evidently a figure of all mankind as they stand before God.

35. The right. This expression seems to convey the same thought as the term “human rights.” In creating man, God endowed him with certain inalienable rights, which He will not take away. In view of the time and circumstances in which these words were written, they constitute a most remarkable assertion of the dignity of the individual.

36. To subvert. The picture is that of dishonestly obtaining a decision against a man who has brought a just suit before a judge.

39. Living man complain. On this verse the traditional Jewish commentary, the Midrash, remarks laconically, “It is sufficient for him that he lives” (*Midrash Rabbah, Lamentations*, sec. 9). The fact that a man has life—a gift of God—is enough to remind him that a divine hand preserves him (see Acts 17:28). The poet here uses a bit of irony to shame the one who is tempted to complain under trial: Will a man who every moment draws breath by the leave of God dare speak against the Lord’s direction of the affairs of the universe?

40. Try our ways. The afflictions and troubles that come to all are reminders that man himself is to search his heart, and that he should change *his* ways if they are not in accord with *God’s* ways.

41. Our heart. See on ch. 2:19. The thought here is not that the heart is to be lifted up in the hands, but that for prayer to be effective, not only the hands, but the heart too, must be lifted up (see Luke 18:10–14).

42. We ... thou. These words, which are made emphatic in the Hebrew, emphasize the appalling contrast between the people and their God. Verse 42 forms a conclusion to the argument that begins with v. 37. The succeeding verses return to a description of the judgments suffered by Judah.

Pardoned. Heb. *salach*, “to forgive”; always used of God’s act, never of man’s. The word frequently lays emphasis on the result of forgiveness as demonstrated by the remission of punishment (Jer. 36:3; Amos 7:2; see on 2 Kings 24:4). It is this thought that seems to be uppermost here. Jeremiah does not say God will not forgive Judah her sins and restore her, for He will (Jer. 33:6–8); but the prophet does say that the Lord has not excused Judah from the punishment that is due her.

44. Not pass through. See on v. 8. It was Judah’s sin that stood as a wall through which her prayers could not pass (see Isa. 59:2).

45. Offscouring. That which is swept away; hence refuse or filth.

46. All. The Hebrew letter *pe’*, which begins vs. 46–48, and the Hebrew letter *’ayin*, which begins vs. 49–51, are in the reverse of their usual alphabetical order (see ch. 4:16, 17; see on ch. 2:16).

47. Fear and a snare. The alliteration in this verse is striking when read in Hebrew, but cannot be reproduced in an English translation.

48. Eye runneth down. See Ps. 119:136; Lam. 1:16; 2:18.

49. Trickleth down. Literally, “runs,” “flows,” or “pours out.” The expression here is a vigorous one and is parallel with v. 48.

51. Affecteth mine heart. This may be understood: (1) that the physical discomfort caused the eyes by continual weeping aggravates the already distraught emotions of the

poet; or (2) that the sights he beholds with his eyes bring grief to his heart. The latter fits in better with the spirit of the book.

53. *Dungeon.* Some have taken vs. 52–57 as autobiographical, recounting Jeremiah’s experience in the dungeon of Malchiah (Jer. 38:1–13). However, there is no record that stones were thrown upon Jeremiah, or that he was in any actual water. However, if these expressions are to be taken figuratively, it would seem that the whole passage here may well be understood as referring to the experience of the nation as a whole.

A stone. Heb. *’eben*. While singular in form, this word seems to be collective in meaning, “stones,” and probably refers to the Hebrew custom of stoning. Thus the body of Absalom was put into a pit and stones were heaped upon it (2 Sam. 18:17). If the word is taken as singular, however, the meaning might be that not only has the afflicted prisoner been put into a dungeon, but a stone has been thrown over its mouth to prevent any possibility that he might escape.

54. *Waters.* A figure typifying great distress (see on Ps. 42:7).

56. *Breathing.* Heb. *rewachah*, from the verb *rewach*, “to be relieved.” *Rewachah* is used only one other place in the Bible, Ex. 8:15, where it refers to the “respite” granted Egypt from the plague of frogs; the Egyptians were given a chance to catch their breath. While the meaning in this verse is not entirely clear, the sense seems to be, “Do not hide thine ear to my cry for respite.”

57. *Fear not.* For comment see on Isa. 41:10.

58. *Pleaded the causes.* That is, pleaded the cases. Jehovah is Israel’s advocate (see 1 John 2:1).

Redeemed. This term is used to describe the action of a near kinsman in avenging the blood of a slain man (Deut. 19:6, translated “avenger”), in buying back property sold by a relative (Lev. 25:25), or in marrying a widowed kinswoman (Ruth 3:13, translated “do the kinsman’s part”). Thus Jehovah is Israel’s avenger (see on Deut. 32:35), her redeemer (see on Ps. 107:2), and her new husband (see on Isa. 54:4–6).

63. *Their rising up.* That is, their whole course of life (see Ps. 139:2).

Their musick. See on v. 14.

64. *Render.* Literally, “thou wilt cause to return.” It seems best to understand vs. 64–66 as a forecast of the punishment Jehovah will bring on those who have ravaged Judah, rather than as a prayer for vengeance (see Vol. III, p. 624), as might at first appear to be the case.

66. *Persecute and destroy.* The Hebrew reads literally, “thou wilt pursue and destroy.”

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

- 14 PK 420
- 18 PK 421
- 22 PK 325, 341, 461
- 22, 23 ML 327, 5T 315
- 22–26PK 421
- 26 7T 243
- 27 MYP 368
- 33 CH 375; GW 239; MB 10
- 37 PP 360

CHAPTER 4

1 *Zion bewaileth her pitiful estate.* 13 *She confesseth her sins.* 21 *Edom is threatened.* 22 *Zion is comforted.*

How. Heb. *'ekah* (for comment see on ch. 1:1).

Like chs. 1; 2; 3, ch. 4 is an acrostic. Its metrical structure differs from the first three poems, however, in that each verse is composed of two major accents instead of three. For a detailed consideration of the structure of Hebrew poetry see. Vol. III, pp. 17–28.

Gold. The figures of gold, fine gold, stones, seem to apply both to the Temple, which had been adorned with gold, and to the people themselves, as appears to be suggested in v. 2.

Top of every street. For comment see on ch. 2:19.

2. Comparable. Literally, “weighed,” or “paid.” The reference is to the weighing out of precious metal as payment for a purchase (Gen. 23:16), a practice common before the use of coined money. The weighing of gold, rather than silver, in a transaction was an indication of the great value of the purchase. For examples of this practice see Ezra. 8:25, 26, 33; Job 28:15; Jer. 32:9; Zech. 11:12.

Esteemed. Heb. *chashab*, “to account,” “to regard,” or “to value.” This word, like the translated “comparable,” is also a commercial term used of recording a transaction (see 2 Kings 22:7).

Earthen pitchers. Pottery vessels were the commonest and cheapest utensils of ancient times. Many thousands of pottery fragments found by archeologists in ancient ruins testify to the commonness of earthenware. The thought of this verse is that the sons of Zion, whose value could only be measured in gold, have been set down in the account books of their enemies as almost worthless. A sad comment indeed on the low state to which Judah had fallen in the days of the prophet Jeremiah.

3. Sea monsters. Heb. *tannin*, “a sea monster,” “a serpent,” etc. (see on Deut. 32:33; Job 7:12). However, two manuscripts have Heb. *tannim*, “jackals” (see on Ps. 44:19). The fact that the verbs translated “draw out” and “give suck,” as well as the pronoun “their,” are plural in Hebrew, indicates that the subject is “jackals.” The reading “jackals” fits the context better than does “a sea monster.”

Ostriches. For comment see on Job 39:13–17.

Dunghills. Literally, “ashpits.” This word seems to signify a dumping ground for rubbish in general. To sit or lie there was a sign of utter degradation (see 1 Sam. 2:8). The city of Jerusalem was now one vast heap of ashes.

6. Stayed. The exact meaning of the Hebrew word thus translated is not certain. The sense, however, seems to be that no human hands were laid on Sodom; her destruction was entirely from above. Since the sin of Jerusalem is greater than that of Sodom, how awful her punishment must be!

7. Nazarites. Heb. *nezirim*, “those consecrated,” “those singled out,” or “those of high rank” (see on Num. 6:2). This noun is derived from the Hebrew verb *nazar*, “to vow,” or “to separate,” and thus refers to one who is separated, or set apart. As a technical term, it was used for a Nazirite (see Num. 6; Amos 2:11, 12; cf. Judges 13:5, 7;

16:17). It is also used in a more general sense of Joseph as “separate” from his brethren (Gen. 49:26; Deut. 33:16). The latter sense seems to fit better here.

Snow. Although such figures usually imply moral cleanness in the OT (see Isa. 1:18), here they can refer only to the imposing outward appearance that the leaders of Judah had once presented.

Rubies. Heb. *peninim*, meaning “gems of coral.”

Polishing. Their appearance was as if they were beautifully wrought images of brilliant stone.

8. Known. That is, they are not recognized, because of the fact that their appearance has been so hideously changed.

Like a stick. Figurative of dryness and hardness.

10. Pitiful. The older meaning of this English word was rather “compassionate,” rather than “pitiable,” as now. Women who were once compassionate and loving mothers have, in their the extreme distress of the siege, eaten their own children (see on ch. 2:20).

Sodden. That is, boiled.

12. Would not have believed. Because of both its strategic position and its fortifications, Jerusalem was considered impregnable. The idea of its inviolability must have been even more enhanced in heathen minds by the supernatural destruction of the Assyrian army when Sennacherib besieged the city (2 Kings 19:35). All this bred a false sense of security among the wicked dwellers in Jerusalem.

13. Iniquities. Judah’s religious leaders were wicked both in heart and in action (see on Isa. 3:12).

Shed the blood. The fact that the priests and the false prophets especially had clamored for the life of Jeremiah (Jer. 26:7–24) would indicate that they bore a large share of responsibility for the death of other righteous men (see Jer. 6:13–15; 23:11–15).

14. Wandered. Or, “staggered.” Perhaps this refers to the confused state of state of these leaders when they, once highly honored, find themselves shunned and outcast by all (see Deut. 28:29).

15. They cried. The antecedent of “they” must be understood here as the people. “Them” refers to the murderous prophets and priests.

Unclean. This was the cry of the (Lev. 13:45).

They said. That is, some of the heathen said among themselves.

16. Anger. Literally, “face.” See Lev. 17:10; Ps. 34:16; Jer. 16:17, 18. Again the Hebrew letters *pe*’ and *‘ayin* are in an inverted order (see on chs. 2:16; 3:46).

Divided. Or, scattered.

Persons. Literally, “faces,” This verse contains an interesting play on words in Hebrew. The wicked were scattered by the *face* of the Lord, because they, in turn, had shown no respect whatsoever for the *faces* of the priests.

18. Streets. That is, the open squares of the city (see on ch. 2:19). During the siege, it was dangerous to enter these open places, as a man was exposed to missiles from the siege towers erected just outside the city walls (see on Jer. 32:24).

19. Mountains. The reduced territory of the kingdom of Judah in the last years of its history consisted of little else than mountains and wilderness.

20. Breath of our nostrils. Some find here a reference to King Zedekiah. Others have been disturbed that Jeremiah could seem to attach such high honor to the memory of a king whom he elsewhere so bitterly castigates. However, the prophet is not here speaking

of Zedekiah as a man, but of the king as the “anointed of the Lord,” the divinely appointed head of the nation (see 1 Sam. 24:5, 6; 26:9, 11; 2 Sam. 1:14, 16).

We shall live. Possibly, the followers of Zedekiah had entertained the vain hope that by escaping from the doomed city, they might maintain some kind of independence in the Wilderness of Judah, or in Transjordan (see on Jer. 39:4, 5).

21. Daughter of Edom. The Edomites were descended from Esau (Gen. 36:8, 19). The animosity that once existed between Jacob and Esau was perpetuated by their descendants (Num. 20:14–21; Deut. 2:4, 5). When the Babylonian armies invaded Judah, the Edomites joined them against Judah, and profited from looting the country (see Eze. 25:12–14; 35:5; Obadiah 11–14). The thought of this verse is ironical: “Rejoice over your ill-gotten gain now, for it will not last long!”

Land of Uz. This country was the home of Job (see on Job 1:1), and is also mentioned in connection with various other neighbors of Judah in Jer. 25:20.

22. Punishment. See on v. 6.

Visit. That is, for the purpose of punishment (see on Ps. 8:4; 59:5).

Discover. Literally, “uncovered,” or “revealed” (see ch. 2:14).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1 EW 227; PP 720; TM 86; 5T 240, 534

10 GC 32

CHAPTER 5

A Pitiful complaint of Zion in prayer unto God.

1. Remember. This final poem in the book of Lamentations is a prayer for restoration. The conditions it portrays are apparently those of Judah and her people in the period after the fall of Jerusalem.

This poem forms a contrast to the poems of chs. 1–4 in several ways: it is not an acrostic, though it does have 22 verses, the same number as the letters of the Hebrew alphabet; and it is not written in the meter characteristic of the Hebrew lament (see p. 544). Nevertheless, this chapter has remarkable poetic qualities. Each verse consists of two parts, which are parallel, reiteration being a well-known device of Hebrew poetry (see Vol. III, pp. 23–28). The poet has also paid an unusual amount of attention to sound, which fact is remarkable, as rhyme and assonance are not generally characteristic of Hebrew poetry.

2. Strangers. See on ch. 1:10.

Widows. See on ch. 1:1. Both figurative and literal widowhood are to be understood here, as many men died in the fighting, while doubtless numbers of others were taken into captivity, but their wives and children were left behind.

4. Water. Even the most common necessities of life can now be had only for a price.

5. Our necks. Literally this clause reads, “upon our necks we are chased.” The meaning may be that they were pursued hotly. Some consider it better to understand the reference to be to the cruelty of the slavery forced upon them: “by our necks we are driven.” In Egyptian inscriptions prisoners are shown tied together by the neck.

Given the hand. That is, “submitted to” (see Ezra 10:19; Jer. 50:15; Eze. 17:18).

Egyptians. Judah had also previously been under the Egyptian domination during the earlier part of Jehoiakim’s reign (see p. 347).

Assyrians See on Ezra 6:22.

Our fathers. See 2 Kings 21:11–15; 23:26, 27).

Servants. In OT usage this term, when applied to government officials, did not necessarily indicate a lesser station in life, but may refer to officials of high rank (see on Neh. 2:10).

9. Sword of the wilderness. This unique expression probably refers to desert marauders who preyed upon the people as they sought food in their denuded and defenseless country.

10. Was black. Literally, “grew hot.” A graphic figure representing the fever that was brought on by the terrible famine of Jerusalem’s final siege (see chs. 2:20; 4:10).

12. Hanged up by their hand. A common method of torture in all ages.

Fell under the wood. Small children were forced to carry excessively heavy loads of wood. Grinding grain and carrying wood were considered menial tasks (see Judges 16:21; see on Joshua 9:21).

14. Gate. See on Gen. 19:1; Joshua 8:29; Lam. 1:4.

15. Dance. Dancing was considered by the Hebrews as a particular expression of joy and praise (Ps. 30:11; 149:3; 150:4; Jer. 31:4, 13; see on 2 Sam. 6:14).

16. Crown. The downfall of national sovereignty becomes symbolic of all that Judah has lost with it.

17. Dim. Either actually from excessive weeping, or figuratively because of the appalling sights beheld (see on ch. 3:51).

18. Mountain of Zion. That is, Jerusalem (see on Ps. 48:1, 2). Mt. Zion was particularly thought of as the dwelling place of the Lord (see Ps. 74:2; 76:2), but now the presence of the Lord has departed.

Foxes. Heb. *shu‘alim*. Also used of jackals (see on Judges 15:4). The presence of foxes, and especially jackals, emphasizes the wildness and desolation of what had once been the heart of a great city. Evidently the setting of this poem is some time after the destruction of the city.

Remainest. No matter what may happen to man, God is over all forever; therefore His promises are sure.

For ever. Heb. *le‘olam* (see on Ex. 12:14; 21:6; 2 Kings 5:27).

20. For ever. Heb. *lanešach* (see on 1 Sam. 15:29).

21. Turn. Literally, “bring back,” “cause to return,” hence, “restore.” This is much more, however, than a prayer for release from captivity. Jeremiah repeatedly used the same language for both temporal and spiritual restoration (Jer. 3:1, 12; 31:16–21). Here is emphasized the fact that only God can restore the lost sinner to divine favor, only He can bestow the grace that makes it possible for a sinner to repent, to “return” to Him (see Acts 5:31; Rom. 2:4).

22. Utterly rejected. The Hebrew may also be translated here as a plaintive question, “But hast thou utterly rejected us?” Jehovah has not utterly rejected Judah. Many are the promises of restoration that Jeremiah himself proclaimed (Jer. 16:13–15; 27:21, 22; 30:5–24; 33:7–9; Lam. 3:22, 31, 32).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (La 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.